Languages of the Eastern Hindu Kush

by A. L. Grunberg

rough translation from Russian on audio cassette by Teija Greed

transcription of audio cassette by Kendall Decker

Note: Transcribers comments in brackets []
Translators parenthetic comments in parenthesis ()

[page 2] Introduction - Munjhan Language

Munjhan is a valley in a mountainous area on the northern slope of the eastern Hindu Kush. It is an isolated area and there has been little research done in that area. River Munjhan is the right hand side source of the River Kokcha and it starts from the main mountain range of the Hindu Kush and flows approximately 60 km. to the direction of northeast. Here Munjhan forms a wide valley except for the estuary area. The area that is inhabited in this is from 36° 45' northern lattitude to 36° 00' northern lattitude and the area is 22 km. and there are (14) settlements or villages in this area. The lowest settlement is situated 2775 m. (8769 ft.) above sea level and the highest one is over 3000 m. (9480 ft.) All the people living in the valley speak Munjhan except for those who live in the highest settlement called Nau and these people are called Kafiri-Kati. They moved from behind this mountain range.[2]

I count 15 on map

Footnote 2: When the author speaks about Munjhan he means the real Munjhan language, there is a language called Yidga which is close to Munjhan. It is spoken in a valley called Lutkuh [Lutkoh] in Chitral. See more in G. Morgenstierne. Indo-Iranian frontier languages, vol. II. Pamir languages. Oslo, 1938, p. 14.

(Of the next bit I am not totally sure of but it is something on the lines of this) Further down from the lowest Munjhan village or kishlak (as the author calls it) at the point 70° 53' eastern longitude 36° 00' northern lattitude Munjhan joins Tagab which is also called Yagnavul and it seems to be an important tributary that gets it start where it separates from the River Sanglich. In this valley there are still two settlements and these two speak Munjhan.[3]

[approximately here begins page 4]

Footnote 3: List of the settlements is given on page 9.

on page 9 he lists 3 villages with 12 houses total that would be 166 ppl per house! he lists 28 villages total pop is 2000 that's 7 ppl per house

According to information from 1967 there are 860 people in these two villages and this includes all maids [girls] over 8 years of age. Overall population would be probably somewhat over 2000 people. All these Munjhan people are bilingual. They speak both Munjan and Persian.[4]

860 in 12 houses still gives 71 per house!

Footnote 4: For the author, Persian means Badakshan, which is Tajik dialects, and also the spoken form of Persian of Afghanistan, which is ari or Farsi Kabuli. It is impossible at this stage to strictly

seperate them.

* * *

Munjhan is very difficult to study ethnographically and linguistically because it is a closed area and it is difficult to get there. From the east, the south, and southwest, the valley is surrounded by the band of the mountain range of Hindu Kush which also divides the rivers. Dozens of the summits reach over 5000 m. Munjhan is seperated from the equally isolated valleys of Nuristan by deep gorges which one can get through only during the dry season. This Nuristan is behind the main mountain range. In the east the highest point of part of the river valley of the River Bazhgul is inhabited by the Eastern Kafiri-Kati. In the south, which is the estuary of River Pech, the river valley of River Parun, or Prasun, is inhabited by Prasun Kafiri. And the river valley of the River Kantiva, or Ktivi, is inhabited by the Western Kafiri-Kati.

approximate beginning of page 51

These same people live in the river valley of the River Ramgel, which is the right hand side source of River Alingar, which is the border of Munjhan in the southwest. In the west a high mountain range separates the Munjhan Valley from a mountainous valley, Andzhuman, which has a small population of Tajiks. There is a path through the gorge from the valley Magnavul to the valley of the River Sanglich which is a tributary of the River Pyandzha the inhabitants of which speak the language Sanglich. It is also difficult to get to Munjhan through the mouth of the river.

Slightly lower from the mouth of the River Magnavul, Munjhan suddenly turns to the west into a deep canyon like ravine in which it flows 10 km. westwards. Afterwhich it joins the River Andzhuman which the lefthand side source of the River Kokcha. This canyon is, practically speaking, virtually impossible to get through and the way to the lowest part of the valley goes through a path which goes through a rather easy but also rather high gorge called Pazhek which is on the righthand side of the valley.[6]

Footnote 6: The part of the river valley of River Munjhan which is lower, the gorge Pazhek, to the point where it joins the River Andzhuman is called Kuran, and there are some villages where the people speak Tajik in this area. Some people who do not live in Munjhan areas sometimes think that Kuran is Munjhan and the actual Munjhan they call Tegab. This particular mistake is in a map that was published in Afghanistan recently.

But this isn't the end of the problems when getting downward from Munjhan to the more populated areas of Ishurma and Fayzabad. From the point where the Rivers Andzhuman and Munjhan join, the path goes along the River Kokcha and past the remarkable deposit of Lapis-Lazuli [at] Sari-Sang. The river goes through very high mountainous masses, the highest peaks of which reach over 6000 m. and form the so called Yangan Pass which is approximately 30 km. long. The path goes through side gorges on the righthand side of the valley. None of these gorges

are particularly high, anyway on the whole they make the path very exhausting.

So far there haven't been many people who have visited Munjhan. (but often they are...) Merchants from Adzhuman and Pandzhir often

[approximate beginning of page 6]

visit Munjhan and so do the representatives of the administration in Kuran where most of the local administration and government are situated. These authorities have spread their influence over Andzhuman, Kuran, and Munjhan. There have also been in the last few years mountaineers in the area who have stayed there for a short while. These people have come from the western countries and Japan and they haven't had any contact with the local people.

The first Europeans who came to the area were N. I. Vavilov and D. D. Bukinich in 1924. They came to the valley from the direction of Sanglich and continued further south towards Parun gorge. Altogether they spent 2 days in the area of Munjhan. Although N. I. Vavilov wasn't an ethnographer nor a linguist he was interested in this particular area in Munjhan as in all of his other works. He found out that there is ethnographical likeness between the Munjhan people and other people who speak Iranian, these people live in Darvaz and Badakhshan. But he didn't take enough notice of the fact that there were linguistic differences between Munjhan people and other mountainous Tajiks.[9]

In October, 1962 a group of West German ethnographers came to Munjhan to work in a Bakhshan expedition from Stuttgart. One of the members of the expedition got ill and they had to stop working. The expedition continued at the end of June, 1963 and continued to the end of August. The result of the expedition was valuable ethnographical material which was published by the members of the expedition.

[approximate beginning of page 7]

There weren't any linguists in the expedition so the linguistic material which was collect is limited. There are names of some domestic utensils."

[Footnote 11: Peter Snoy. Nuristan and Munjan, SS.125-147. ~~Probably~~ in German]

* * *

The main occupation of the Munjhan people is irrigation cultivation and animal husbandry. They grow wheat and barley, breed cows, sheep and goats. They also have some yaks. In the warm time of the year many men go to the area called Dalukhan where they paid labor for a certain time and there they buy salt and take this through the estuary of the River Kokcha and the Parun gorge to the river valley of River Parun and change it with cattle and domestic utensils.[12]

Footnote 12: The author says that Peter Snoy has noted that wooden domestic utensil one can't get in Munjhan, they don't make them there themselves but most of them come from the Nuristan area.

(The next bit I'm not totally sure of because there are two words that I can't find any equivalents in English. One is 'sho' which probably means some kind of a Muslim leader, another word is 'myurida', or something like that, but I think the text is rather clear so I say what it is in my opinion) Munjhan people are Muslims and most of them are followers of two 'sho' or leaders. They call these leaders in Tajik 'shoy kalon' and 'shoy mayda' which mean 'big sho' and 'little sho'. Earlier these leaders used to live in a village called Kalai-sho but later, as the Munjhan people confirm, the authorities demanded them to move away. So they moved away from Munjhan. Shoy-kalon, which is the big sho, lives in Dzhurma nowadays. The small sho, or leader lives in Kuran. Although they don't have anymore their secular power they still are the main religious authority in Munjhan.[13]

Footnote 13: Here the author refers to the text of the book where there is more ethnographic information on Munjhan. (Then he says that) The ethnography of Munjhan is close to the ethnography of the peoples of Pamir, many features are close. Since the typologies of the Munjhan language and the Pamir languages are related one can speak about the Pamir-Munjhan ethnolinguistic area. (He refers to a book by himself and I. M. Steblin-Kamensky called) The Ethnolinguistic Characteristics of the Eastern Hindu Kush. 1970.

[page 21]

There aren't any schools in Munjhan and there are very few literate people.

According to the information that the author has, there is no information about that time when the Munjhan people moved to the estuary area of the River Kokcha. There are memories of a relatively recent period of the prosperity that Munjhan used to have when they were relatively independant even from Badakhshan villages and they only had their own leaders (which are called 'sho'). However there are indirect proofs of the fact that the Munjhan people moved to the area long time ago. [possible paragraph break]

Typonomies of Munjhan and Tajik, and at least in relation to a part of them, one could say that they ~~they~~ are originally Munjhan words. [possible location of footnote 14] All the Munjhan villages have parallel names by which they are known in the surrounding Tajik settlements. A part of these names are close phonetically with the equivalent Munjhan words, whereas others are very different.[15]

Footnote 14: The typonomies of Munjhan are contrasted also with the typonomies of the Valley Lutkhoh [Lutkoh] where the Yidga live. As Biddulph writes in his book [Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh] of 1880 [p.64], the Yidga believe that they moved to Lutkoh from Munjhan seven generations ago after the leaders of Badakhshan had invaded the area and the village area of Munjhan was destroyed. As Morgenstierne says [IFL, 16], this information seems likely and it's also tied with the linguistic facts.

Footnote 15: The Tajik names of the villages, etc., are official and you can find them in the maps, whereas the Munjhan names and words

are only used by the Munjhan people themselves and they aren't known outside the Munjhan area.

[beginning of page 9]

Persian	Munjhan	Number of houses in the village
located in the river valley of the River Munjhan		
[		
šahr-i Munǰan	šorón	70
ghamond	ghumóndo	4
daštak	daškwont	5
diambi	javówont	11-12
wílw	wi&'lg&'va	20
ghaz	ghaz	30
s&^oh-i pari	spe=&'zmina	20
sarj&^angal	we=&'ya	13
miyondi	s&^o&'la	35
yughda&'k	yughdak&'	16
pano&'m	pe=&'nim	10
l'a-i s&^ah	xoj&^a&'l&'k&'ay	4
tili	x&^ule=&'y	27
naw	niw	8]
located in the river valley of the River Magnavul		
[		
tagow	taga&'w	5
maghnawul	ma&'me=lgha	4
wilf	wilf	3]

It seems likely that the Munjhan people are ancient inhabitants of the valley and also that they've had ties with the neighboring Kafiristan, especially with the Prasun Kafirs for a long time.

[approximate beginning of page 10]

This is because in the Munjhan language there are special typonomies for the designations of all the villages of the river valley of River Parun which aren't linked with the generally used ones, neither with the Prasun names and this is shown in the following list:

Generally used names	Prasun language names	Munjhan language names
pas&^ki	us&^i&'t	ve=ni&'gha
cacum	zumu&'	ghri&'vghika
kis&^taki	wis&^u&:&'	ke=&'s&^tevyo
dewa	wicu&:&'	ka&'rcina
parunc	sec&^	xu&'gha
is&^tawi	s&^upu&'	sri&'gha

In the light of everything that has been said above it doesn't look likely that the way through the Parun gorge has(n't) been there for very

long as Morgenstierne suggests [IIFL, 9]. It's more likely that this road is the oldest road that linked Nuristan with Munjhan. The relations of these two areas weren't always war-like, as well as the relations of the other peoples in different valleys in Kafiristan used to be very different.

It seems likely that the existing intensive trade exchange between Munjhan and Nuristan, where salt and Munjhani woolen long garments are changed with crops and domestic utensils, that this kind of link started in ancient times. And also the Munjhan have memories of armed fights with their military neighbors in the south.

[beginning of page 11]

* * *

The first bits of information in the European science on the Munjhan language were published by R. Shaw[20], where there were very unclearly recorded a few dozen Munjhan words which were compared with words of Wakhan, Sarykoli, Shugnan, and Sanglich languages. In a book by Biddulph[21], there is a bit wider description on Munjhan and Yidgha languages where in addition to isolated words he also gives a few paradigms.

[Footnote 20: R. Shaw. On the Ghalchah Languages. P. 272-278.
Footnote 21: J. Biddulph. Tribes of the Hindoo Koosh. App. I.
Footnote 22: W. Tomaschek. Jidgha, ein beachtenswerter eranischer Dialect. Beitra&:ge zur Kunde der Indogermanischen Stra&:chen. Siebenter Band. Go&:ttingen, 1883.]

Tomaschek's[22] [see above] comments on the Yidgha language are based on this material. His comments, or notes, include a list of words which have been grouped according to their semantic categories, like: the sky, the land, animals, family, and so on. Then there are lists of a few adjectives, abstract noun, numerals, adverbs, grammatical indicators, and the personal forms of the verb are given. But the amount of these examples is very limited, and then he lists a few verbs as well. As already said the amount of these examples on the whole is limited and some of them have already vanished, they don't exist in the modern Munjhan language anymore. Therefore this documentary is very valuable because it's a source of lexical material even though it's not totally clearly transcribed.

Tomaschek emphasizes that on the basis of material that Biddulph published it can be said with confidence that Munji and Yidgha

[approximate beginning of page 12]

languages belong to more ancient dialects that are spoken in Iran and therefore vocabulary (that means Munjhan vocabulary) is very important in any case for those who research languages.[23]

Footnote 23: Iran is understood as the whole area where the Iranian languages have spread.

In 1963, Van den Ghayn[25] published a small work on languages Wagnobi and Yidghah. The part that is on Yidghah language is based on

the material by Biddulph and Tomaschek and here he's trying to find the etymology for a few words of Yidghah and use this material to explain a few geographical names which are known in antique sources.

Geiger[27] comments on Yidgha and Munjan only briefly in addition to a mention in his compendium, a part, called Pamir dialects. His books are based on Grierson's[28] materials. There are three texts by Grierson then a short essay on grammar and a small dictionary.

M. Gauthiot[29], made newer and clearer records on Munjhan language in 1913 with a person who moved from Munjhan to Kuliap [?]. These records are in form of a comment and he mentions a few phonetic and historical phonetic specialities of the Munjhan language. Also there is a list of chosen words in the book. The author adds a few points to the materials published by Tomschek, Geiger, and Gauthiot on the characteristics of the Munjhan language and he basis his material on material that he collected himself in Pamir from people who moved from Munjhan. The amount of material isn't very big and most of it is published in this particular book.

[Footnote 25: P. J. Van den Gheyn. Le Yidghah et le Yagnobi. Etude sur deux dialects de l'Asie Centrale. Bruxelles, 1883.

Footnote 27: W. Geiger. The Indian Hindukush Dialects called Munj&^ani and Yudgha. Avesta, Pahlavi and Ancient Persian Studies, 1904. pp. 221-223.

Footnote 28: G. A. Grierson. Speciman Translations in the Languages of the North Western Frontier. Calcutta, 1899.

Footnote 29: M. Gauthiot. Quelques Observations sur le Mindjani. Mem. de la Soc. de Linguistique de Paris, v.XIX, 1915.]

[approximate beginning page 13] footnote #30 datum p.13 (russian!)

Zarubin's [?] records on Munjhan differ from the earlier ones because they are more accurate. However, because of the small amount of material and the fact that only one of the Munjhan dialects, that is the higher one, is described in it.

For this reason the author can't give accurate phonological characteristics of Munjhan. So the author doesn't mention an essential opposition in the language between s&^-s&^&>, z&^-z&^&>, but there aren't chocumental [?] sounds in Munjhan. He hasn't got a clear picture of the phonological structure of the Munjhan vowel system. Also he didn't notice that there are two central vowel phonemes, namely a - a=, in it. He uses the symbol a to indicate phonologically different entities. (There are a few examples in the bracket).

In the concise and informative historico-phonetic characteristics he mentions several examples, for example the old Iranian word initial 'x&^&>' has been preserved, and Old Iranian 's&^' between vowels has changed into 'y' , and so has 't' changed into 'y'. This is different from Afghan [Pashto?] where the Old Iranian 't' changed into 'l'. Grammatical information in his essay are inevitably only fragments, and in the parts where he writes on participles they aren't accurate.

[approximate beginning of page 14]

The writer didn't notice that there are functionally different participles which only the stress makes a difference. (Then there are two examples given). And these are thought to be functionally identical although the first form is a participle form of first feminine, and the second is a participle form of second masculine. Zarubin's [2] fluent analysis on Munjhan material concludes that Munjhan is close to Afghan (Pashto 2) and relatively far from the Pamir languages.

In 1938, G. Morgenstierne [31, IIFL] published another work most of which discussed Yidgha and Munjhan. His monograph is based on the works of his predecessors and also on his own materials that he collected in 1929 in Chitral. These materials are mostly on a dialect Yidgha and special chapters discuss phonetics, historical phonology, morphology, and also a small amount of texts and dictionary which includes many words that haven't been recorded earlier.

Morgenstierne's work is a remarkable step forwards in the research of Yidgha in synchronic level and the diachronic aspect of both of the dialects. The later is mostly in that part where he observed the similarities between them. However this work doesn't give an accurate presentation of the specifics of Munjhan because the author had access to a limited amount of material which wasn't always reliable. Therefore he wasn't able to make the phonological system of Munjhan more accurate and for example the vowel system with twelve phonemes that the author introduced was a step backwards when compared with the scheme of Zarubin [2].

(approximate beginning of page 15)

Since there isn't any kind of reliable phonological scheme and in some degree it is it also the case with the material on Yidgha this makes the derivations and etymologies that the author introduces in the historico-phonological part of the book less valuable. Neither is there a description on the differences between Yidgha and Munjhan in the area of synchronic morphology. Among the texts there is only one story with eleven phrases in Munjhan.

Therefore even after the work of Morgenstierne it would be urgent to have registered or recorded a bigger amount of Munjhan texts which would be an important base for conclusions on both the synchronic and the diachronic levels especially since the substitution of Munjhan by the Tajik language is continueing.[34]

Footnote 34: There's only one work later than these above mentioned which includes new Munjhan material. It is a dictionary by Shah Abdullah Badakhsi. A dictionary of some languages and dialects of Afghanistan. Kabul. 1960. There the Munjhan vocabulary is recorded in Arabic script. See about the characteristics of this script in Morgenstierne's "Notes on the Pashto Yalana Vocabulary of Munji". Acta Orientalia, XXX, 1966.

I started the research of Munjhan in 1966 when I was working in Badakhshan with a group doing geological surveillance for the Department of Geology and search of hard minerals with the Ministry of Mining in Afghanistan. Since the Afghan leaders, engineers Arif and Asadullah, were favorable towards my special request, there was a Munjhan peasant called Haki from the village Gaz among the staff and Haki was a good story-teller and informant. From him I got most of the

material that the texts are published in this book.

I continued my research on Munjhan for three and a half months from June to the middle of September. While I was recording texts with phonological transcription I also recorded phonetic material on the tape recorder. I also taped coherent texts and partially recorded them at the same time in a notebook. I used a Bavilieg [?] tape recorder, made in West Germany.

[approximate beginning of page 16]

In 1967 when I was working in a group that was looking for gold from the Department of Geology and search for hard minerals, I ask one of the leaders, Mr. Agha Mohammed Khan, wheither we could have a Munjhan worker among us so that I could continue my research on Munjhan. This happened and during more than one and a half months, from July to August, I worked with a peasant called Duvlat from a village called Shoron. I checked all the texts that I had recorded earlier and recorded some new ones. The materials that I had collected made it possible for me to make the phonological characteristics of Munjhan more accurate. In the beginning of August 1967, I went to the lazuli deposites at Sari-Sang. When we had finished the main work I could stay in the area because of the help of Mr. Karim Isak and a Soviet specialist Kobov. And there I could record a few texts with Munjhan workers which had come from villages in Munjhan. Among the workers there was also my first informant, the peasant Haki from village Gaz and he was a great help for me.

On the 22nd of August, just before the celebration of the independance of Afghanistan, with the help of Mr. Karim Misak, Haki and two other peasants, working in the lazuli mine, and also myself, went back to Munjhan where I stayed till the 30th of August. During that time I visited all the Munjhan villages except for village Hule [?]. I added more material and made more accurate that material that I had collected earlier, especially the lexical material.

When I was doing the research I found out different differences in dialect. The dialects are divided into following: the lower dialect that is villages s&^oron, das&^k, ghumonda. The central dialect villages spezmina, ghaz, wilgva.

[approximate beginning of page 17]

And the higher dialect villages s&^ola, pesnim, xoj&^akkay, wilya [?], yughdak. According to the information that I got about the higher village or settlement, Hula, there is a special dialect there. I didn't go there and among the texts I have there aren't any from this village.

I will be discussing the similarities between the dialects more later. Here I will mention that the differences between the lower and the central dialects are relatively small, whereas the differences between the lower and central dialects as opposed to the higher dialect are bigger. The biggest part of my material is on the central dialect.

In this work I use transcription which is basically phonological. Most of the symbols are what I generally used in works about Iranian languages without written form. An exception is the uvular voiced

spirant which I mark gh instead of g'.